



OHV Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes			
Meeting Name	OHV Advisory Committee Meeting (5)		
Date	9-21-11	Time	1:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Location	US Army Corps of Engineers, Hodges Village Dam Oxford, MA	Meeting Host	Stephanie Cooper, EEA
Attendees			
Stephanie Cooper (EEA)	Randy Toth	Ken Anderson	Mike Wade (for Dan D'Arcy)
Priscilla Chapman	Briere, Gary (DCR)	Chris Baker (OLE)	Celia Riechel (EEA)
Tad Ames	Tim Russell (USACE)		
Absentees			
Dan D'Arcy	Chris Mossman	Chief Ernest Horn	
Aaron Gross (OLE)		Lewis Howe (or Colleen McGuire)	Peter Masiokas (or Linda Lacke)
Sharon Jordan	Lt. Merri Walker (OLE)	Susan Hibbert	Chris Burton

Synopsis of Items Discussed
<p>1. Summary of morning tour of US Army Corps of Engineers' Hodge's Village Dam trails and facilities</p> <p>The primary purpose of the Hodge's Village Dam area is flood control, but their secondary missions are provision of public recreational opportunities, ecological management, and stewardship. The dam has prevented over \$110 million in estimated damages to homes and property downstream since its construction. It contributes an estimated \$1 million to the local economy. The USACE permits the public to access the property on dirt bikes, bicycles, horses, and hiking on its trails. There has been a significant increase in ridership at Hodge's Village in the past two years, and they are traveling from greater distances than previously. This may be due to the restriction of OHVs in other regional facilities.</p> <p>2. Update on DCR trail conditions and usage – Gary Briere</p> <p>DCR properties sustained significant damage from Hurricane Irene and Lee, especially at October Mountain. Many of the footbridges for all types of uses were washed away, but the bridge at Roaring Brook was the only key span that was lost. Others were re-opened after things dried out.</p> <p>At the next meeting of this committee, we hope to have usage numbers from Pittsfield and October Mountain from 2009 and this year for comparison. This year usage is down significantly at Pittsfield—we aren't coming anywhere near the 50 permits/day we were anticipating. What are you</p>

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hearing from the riding community? The permits are free.

There wasn't a lot of enthusiasm from the riding community to initiate a permit program at October Mountain.

Since keeping track, we've found that the average (Massachusetts resident) rider is traveling 99 miles to ride. That shows how important it is to people to have opportunities to ride.

Tim Russell: Out-of-state riders with street plates must still have a MA registration to ride off-road in Massachusetts. USACE cannot legally enforce state laws, but most people comply. Locals are the most likely to flout regulations.

Comments: People don't go to Pittsfield SF to ride because there isn't enough trail mileage to make it worth their while. People don't go to October Mountain because the trails are in terrible condition, which makes them too difficult for most riders.

The depressed economy also reduces ridership because it is expensive to ride and people are cutting back on discretionary spending.

There are so many routes in and out of these properties—how do you really track the usage?

Gary Briere: DCR is focusing its outreach in parking lots and out on the trails, trying to reach as many people as possible. We're working on improving trail marking, though it's still inadequate on some trail systems.

We hope to have an end-of-season update summary by the rangers at Pittsfield and October Mountain. It would be valuable for the OHV Committee members to attend. We could possibly have them present at the next meeting.

3. OHV Fund update – Stephanie Cooper

The fund will have revenue from fines, but there is a delay from when a summons is issued to adjudication, so some of it could not be reflected in the balance yet. We also need to go through the process of educating the courts about where the revenue from fines goes, that it does not go to the general fund. Once it goes to the general fund, there isn't a good mechanism for getting it back and allocated to the OHV fund. EEA will work on a way to do this.

We fell a little short of our earlier projection of revenue (\$800,000), but expenditures were also somewhat lower than anticipated. Some items came in under estimated costs, and others haven't actually been procured yet.

The 25% to be used for land and trails has not been spent yet (current balance is about \$200,000).

The 25% allocation is the minimum; it could be more. About 1/3 of OLE's enforcement work is for OHVs.

Comments: Would like to have information on how many registrations are for two- or four-wheeled vehicles. Captain Baker explained the limitations of the current database system in terms of running this type of query.

The OHV fund expenditures should be posted online. It should help identify one-time expenditures.

Would like to hear about the safety efforts—is this money well-spent?

Don't want OHV fund used to education other groups. But many other users don't even know about the regulation changes, so it could be to everyone's benefit to get the word out more broadly.

4. Potential uses for OHV trail funds

This group will serve an important role in advising on how the OHV land and trails fund should be

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used. Remember that the legislation stipulates that it may be used for the maintenance or acquisition of land used by OHVs, or for grants to municipalities or private entities to provide OHV riding opportunities.

Discussion: Should maintenance of existing OHV trails be the priority, or should the fund be used to acquire new riding areas?

Trail maintenance should be the priority because the existing trails are in poor condition and often unusable. Fixing existing trails would be a very visible use of the fund that would show the state is committed to making improvements.

The fund would have to accumulate for a long time before there would be enough money to buy enough land to build something like in Jericho, NH. Land in Massachusetts is really expensive. Why should we have to buy new land for OHV trails? The state should allow riding in some of its existing state forests and parks. Old logging roads could easily be turned into OHV trails, at very little cost.

New riding areas would show people that the fund is being well-spent to really benefit them. Riders have been paying for years. Show them they get something for it.

Maintenance is crucial. Not even ATVs are able to easily navigate the trails at October Mountain, and definitely not other users. The first priority should be to show that we can actually take care of OHV trails. Otherwise the new trails will fall into just as bad of shape as the current ones.

Bad road-crossings and poor signage also need to be fixed. The trails are such that you can't avoid riding on the road even if you wanted to, because the trail just dumps you out onto a road. October Mountain could be the best OHV riding in the state, but it's going to take a lot of money and a big effort to fix it up.

Yes, we need to do maintenance but we should also be looking at other existing state lands to be opened up for OHV usage. DCR's Motorized Trail Recreation Facility Assessment Policy was briefly discussed, and suggested that Committee members familiarize themselves with it (http://www.mass.gov/dcr/recreate/ohv_policy.pdf). This policy was the result of a robust stakeholder process several years ago. It was discussed that any discussions about the policy would be most productive if they are grounded in its specifics of this policy (including suggestions for changes to it).

Is there a minimum mileage of trails that makes acquiring land worth it? 5 miles?

Gary Briere: Maintenance is the most likely immediate investment for the fund, because it is so desperately needed, and because there simply isn't enough money in the fund to purchase land for a new riding area. This will yield the most immediate and visible benefit to the rider community. If we try to get OHV trails on other state land, it will trigger an immediate battle with opponents, which could drag on for years without riders seeing one new mile of trail. We need to demonstrate that OHV riding can be done in a sustainable way, and that should start on the existing OHV trails. The costs are really substantial, and it's not just the cost to construct trail, but to maintain it: one two mile stretch of trail in Pittsfield cost DCR about \$600,000 for significant rehabilitation, and thereafter we carry the burden to maintain it. One bridge costs about \$150,000. Add to this that DCR cannot use volunteers as efficiently as the Army Corps can—we simply do not have the institutional pathways in place to permit it. As we make new investments, we have to keep in mind the on-going maintenance costs we will incur.

Discussion: The US Army Corps uses logging as an opportunity to also consider changes in use—this makes a lot of sense to take the opportunity to consider a property in its entirety, rather than making one plan for forest management and a separate plan for trails. After they log, they often re-route trails to facilitate recovery of worn areas.

Hodge's Village would probably not meet the rare species/habitat fine filter, but very few places in

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Massachusetts would. There is rare species habitat on the property, but trails are routed away from it and there is no documented decline in species prevalence. Rare species monitoring is conducted every 10-15 years. They have found species they never expected to find there. The sustainable coexistence of OHV trails, other users, and rare species habitat requires good planning and maintenance, but it can be done.

More riders are running from the EPOs, possibly because the fines are higher and they haven't registered their vehicle because they don't think there are enough places to ride.

USACE's budget for trail maintenance at Hodge's Village is \$5,000 per year. They are able to work effectively with this low level of funding because most of their material is donated (from the adjacent rock quarry), and much of their labor is performed by volunteers.

Even trails that are officially closed to OHV use must be patrolled by OLE because people will ignore the signs and still ride. The group agreed that the best use of current trail funding is to repair existing OHV trails on DCR property. DCR will work on potential projects and share with the Committee at the next meeting.

5. Education and enforcement update

This discussion was postponed until next meeting due to time constraints.

6. Items for next meeting

Send feedback to OLE on a course they are thinking about approving – link was emailed.

Should the mother of the boy who was killed in an OHV accident, and whose death precipitated the new regulations, be permitted to come speak to the committee? Do we need some policy on direct contact with advocates?

The group decided the next meeting should be for a longer block of time to allow for full discussion of issues. The group also tentatively decided to include a site visit to DCR's trails in the Berkshires, weather permitting.

Synopsis of Next Steps/Action Items

1. DCR will compile a list of potential high-visibility, quick-return uses for the OHV Fund.
2. Send OLE safety training presentation and summary of participants to date
3. Committee members should think about trails criteria and bring a list of specific changes they want to discuss.

Previous Meeting date	June 15, 2011
Next Meeting Date	Early December, possibly Wed. 7th, 2011. TBD
Next Meeting Time	1pm – 3:30pm
Next Meeting Location	Pittsfield? October Mountain? TBD